

Obamacare continues to be a source of controversy and public anger. Several weeks ago the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services announced that it would require faith-based employers – including charities, schools, universities, and hospitals – to provide birth control and related services.

Under the ruling, religious institutions would be forced to offer their employees health coverage for sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs and devices, and contraception – directly at odds with many of their institutional beliefs. Churches and places of worship would be exempt.

Not surprisingly, many such religious organizations cried foul. My office received more than a few phone calls from residents of South Alabama alarmed at this latest government overreach.

Simply put, the new Obama administration ruling is an attack on religious freedom, a freedom explicitly and prominently protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Last Monday I joined over 150 other Members of Congress in sending a letter to HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius voicing strong opposition to the ruling.

Speaker John Boehner took to the House floor Wednesday announcing legislative action, pledging that if President Obama did not reverse his administration's ruling, then the House would do that for him. The House Energy & Commerce Committee, which has primary jurisdiction over this issue, is already laying the groundwork for legislative action.

Furthermore, I cosponsored legislation (HR 1179) that would block the Obama administration ruling and permit a health plan to decline coverage of specific items and services that are contrary to the religious beliefs of the sponsor, issuer, or other entity offering the plan or the purchaser or beneficiary (in the case of individual coverage) without penalty.

Late last week, bowing to pressure from millions of Americans, religious groups and Congress, the Obama administration revised its controversial new policy to a point. It now says religious

organizations will not be forced to provide or pay for birth control services. Insurance companies will cover the cost.

The heavy handedness of the White House led to the public outcry in the first place and the president's determination to impose Obamacare's mandates on the country continues unabated.

Of course, I remain supportive of efforts to end Obamacare outright. I voted for the full repeal of Obamacare in January 2011 and instead support market-based health care reforms that protect a person's right to choose their own doctor and coverage plan without government mandates.

House Passes STOCK Act

Last Thursday, I voted for the Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge (STOCK) Act to strengthen current law prohibiting Members of Congress and other government employees from personally benefiting from confidential information accessed during the performance of their jobs. The STOCK Act passed the House of Representatives by a 417 to 2 vote.

For more than 50 years, it has been illegal for anyone in government service, including in Congress, to financially benefit from confidential information received in the performance of their duties. By passing the STOCK Act, the House reiterated that Congress should abide by the same set of rules as the rest of America.

In addition to underscoring that Members of Congress are legally prohibited from personally gaining from non-public information received during the performance of their duties, the STOCK Act also strengthens reporting requirements for Congress and the Executive Branch.

Monroeville Jr. High Visits DC

Last week, students from Monroeville Jr. High School's robotics team participated in the

Presidential Science Fair. Monroeville Jr. High was the only Alabama school to receive an invitation to this prestigious national event where they personally demonstrated their robotic creations for the president.

Monroeville Jr. High is one of 24 Alabama schools involved in the Boosting Engineering Science and Technology program, which introduces students to engineering and technology and teaches the skills needed for Alabama's high-tech workforce.

After their visit to the White House, the students arrived on Capitol Hill where it was my honor to personally join them for cake and lemonade.

These students share a special distinction with the BCS Championship Alabama Crimson Tide and the Super Bowl-winning New York Giants – their accomplishments earned them a visit to White House and a meeting with the president. Well done, Monroeville Jr. High!

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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